



**COME
TOGETHER,
CANADA.**

**Stronger connections,
better mental health.**



FINDING CONNECTION IN THE WORKPLACE, A TOOLKIT FOR EMPLOYEES AND MANAGERS

The following toolkit is designed for both employees and managers/team leaders to understand the importance of social connection at work. Use this toolkit and the corresponding activities to facilitate team discussion and help foster a sense of connection and support in the workplace.

OVERVIEW

Connection is closer than you think

Mental Health Week is an important moment to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and promote open conversations about mental health.

It's also a moment for workplaces to come together to create safe and supportive spaces for conversations about mental health and work to strengthen workplace work culture.

So, where do we start? With connection! Social connection is a human need, and our very survival and ability to thrive depends on how we interact with others. Research shows that strong social support is linked to:

- Higher rates of well-being
- Greater safety and resilience
- Increased prosperity

Strong social support boosts well-being, resilience, and success. Yet the rates

of social disconnection are rising: in 2023, the WHO declared loneliness and social isolation a global health concern, including in workplaces.

That's why CMHA's 2026 Mental Health Week theme is Come Together, Canada. A call for everyone to connect and support one another, because connection strengthens mental health.

THE IMPACT OF LONELINESS

Impact on Employees:

Workplace loneliness can seriously affect employees' mental health and job performance. It increases stress, contributes to burnout, and can reduce motivation, creativity, and engagement. Loneliness may also lead to higher absenteeism and a sense of disconnection from the team. Recognizing it empowers employees to act, building supportive relationships and contributing to a more connected, psychologically healthy workplace.

Impact on Managers and Teams:

Managers need to understand workplace loneliness because it impacts both employees and organizational performance. Lonely employees are less engaged, less productive, and more likely to leave, while loneliness also increases stress and health risks. Addressing it helps managers foster connection, psychological safety, and a stronger, more collaborative workplace.

THE BENEFITS OF CONNECTION IN THE WORKPLACE

Social connection in the workplace can reduce loneliness, help prevent burnout, and increase productivity – it is also essential to our mental health and well-being. Meaningful connections and relationships at work, with both co-workers and leaders, builds a system of support away from home. Socially connected employees are engaged and more likely to stay with the organization.ⁱ

When employees experience good social connections at work, this leads to better team building, reduced conflicts, stronger collaborations and idea sharing, and overall, a sense of belonging and positivity in the workplace. When teams are connected and healthy, they thrive.

Disconnection and social isolation are on the rise at work

Siloed teams, dependency on digital communication tools, mismatched time zones / locations, feelings of being overworked, and blurring of the

lines between work and home are all contributing to a growing feeling of loneliness at work.

The statistics reveal a stark reality:

- Loneliness in the workplace is linked with higher rates of anxiety, depression, burnout, lower job performance, and decreased job satisfaction.ⁱⁱ
- About 36% of Canadian workers reported feeling isolated, notably higher than the 27% global average.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Gen Z workers (18-24) are three times more likely than baby boomers to feel disconnected at work,^{iv} with 54% saying they feel lonely at work some of the time.^v
- 38% of Canadians do not feel their workload is reasonable or being well managed.^{vi}
- Nearly a quarter (21%) of Canadian employees do not feel their workplace is supportive with 45% reporting a lack of workplace relationships they trust.^{vii}

Managers are also not well equipped to deal with this, which further compounds the issue. Only 37% of managers report receiving training on dealing with evolving and distributed teams and mental health support for employees.^{viii} 76% of employees feel that managers have not been sufficiently trained or lack the training.^{ix}

Successfully connected teams are...

Across the board, the team leaders, organizations, and managers that are finding ways to adapt to the future culture of work are finding the most success in combatting isolation in the workplace.

Leading Canadian organizations are moving beyond “one-system thinking” (only focusing on productivity or sales, etc.) to intentionally designing cultures that prioritize:

- Purposeful collaboration: bringing employees in-person specifically for social bonding and brainstorming moments.
- Rethinking what inclusion means: providing training and support for timely stressors (such as free therapy or coaching programs).
- Virtual social moments: implementing regular social gatherings, even 30 minutes weekly, to connect virtually about non-work items, play games, etc.
- Investing in manager training: coaching managers to prioritize well-being and check in on mental health.
- Investing in employee growth: growth opportunities and on-the-job training contribute greatly to employee happiness and connection, and teams need to invest in this.

HOW MANAGERS CAN SUPPORT

Employees and managers should prioritize relational touchpoints. It doesn't matter where someone works; what

matters is the quality of the relationships they have while working there

Another strategy is to create cultures of autonomy. Studies show that autonomy is one of the most significant factors influencing employee loneliness. Employees who are given flexibility over schedules and work style report lower levels of loneliness and feel more empowered.

Here are some steps employers can take to build connection in the workplace:

- Develop team building strategies that are tailored to a hybrid work setting
- Push for investments in employee training and development
- Hold regular, structured 1:1 check-ins that include dedicated time to discuss employee well-being, focusing on relational vs transactional development
- Regularly acknowledge and celebrate team members
- Hold regular team building activities that centre around bonding and sharing of non-work-related topics.
- Accessible leadership is another positive contributor to mitigating loneliness among teams. This means being available for check-ins and open conversations with your team and supporting their needs, not just the work. Across all work models, employees who are supported by a leader who is there for them feel more connected to their teams.^x

- ⁱ Signal49, Tackling Workplace Loneliness and Isolation Through Leadership and Choice (March 2025, https://www.signal49.ca/product/tackling-workplace-loneliness-and-isolation-through-leadership-and-choice_mar2025/)
- ⁱⁱ Oxford University Press & Society of Occupational Medicine, Loneliness in the workplace: a mixed-method systematic review and meta-analysis (Dec 2023), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38285544/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Microsoft Word Trend Index, The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work—Are We Ready? (March 2021), <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work>
- ^{iv} Telus Health Index, “Employees under 40 in Canada the most isolated and lonely.”
- ^v Mental Health Research Canada, Guarding Minds at Work - Evaluating Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (June 2023), <https://www.mhrc.ca/guarding-minds>
- ^{vi} Mental Health Research Canada, “Guarding Minds at Work.”
- ^{vii} Telus, Telus Mental Health Index (January 2024), https://go.telushealth.com/hubfs/MHI%202024/Canada_MHI_January_English_2024.pdf
- ^{viii} Concordia University, Remote, Hybrid or In-Person? How Work Location Affects Loneliness and Employee Engagement (August 2025), https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/996003/1/Oza_MSc_F2025.pdf
- ^{ix} Environics Research (on behalf of Dialogue), The state of workplace health and wellness in Canada (Feb 2023), <https://www.dialogue.co/en/2023/the-state-of-workplace-health-and-wellness-in-canada/#:~:text=Employers%20and%20employees%20are%20on,trained%20or%20lack%20the%20training.>
- ^x Signal49, “Tackling Workplace Loneliness and Isolation Through Leadership and Choice.”

